

GRTC

Interview: Harry West

Harry West: ... the date is the...

Laura Browder: Twenty-third. [Pause.] Thank you. So, Mister West, I'm gonna--I think you've already seen the questions--basically, it's like twenty... twenty questions.

HW: Mm hmm.

LB: And... I just wanted to start off by having you tell me something, if you don't mind, about... how you grew up, where you grew up, what it was like when you grew up.

HW: Well, I grew up in the east end of Richmond in the area called Fulton. And... I'm the oldest of four kids. Um... I was born in 1950. The first... house that I remember us living in is 10 Arlene Street, which is... across the street from the boathouse that's down in Fulton now. Um... it was a neighborhood where everybody knew everyone. You went to school--everybody walked to school. You... everybody knew everybody. You know, you went to school, the first grade--I mean, the first school you go to, you went from the first to the sixth grade. Then, of course, you went to junior high. The, uh, seventh through the ninth. And you went to high school... the tenth through the twelfth. Uh, it was... it was good!

LB: What high school did you go to?

HW: Kennedy--I was in the first class that graduated from John F. Kennedy in '69.

LB: Oh, wow.

HW: The school had just opened up '68.

LB: Yeah.

HW: Yeah. And... from there... I had several jobs, but I was drafted in the military... '69, end of '69. And I--from--when I was drafted in the military, I went to Vietnam for fifteen months, from June of, uh... six--from June of '70 to September of '71. And that's when I came to the bus company.

LB: What was your MOS?

HW: Sixty-four C... Charlie (?). I was in the combat support unit.

LB: So that must've been... quite--

HW: Yeah. It was interesting. And in fact, I went back to Vietnam in two-thousand and five. Just to see... the difference when it--from when I was there and what it is now.

LB: Tell me about that.

HW: It was a good trip for me. I--I'll always wanted to go back. But I... pretty much talked myself into doing it. And in 2005, it was my fiftieth...fifth birthday and I went over there in September. Cuz I was born September the 23rd and then I spent my fifty-fifth birthday there for twelve days. I met a... terrific Vietnamese family. I had my own personal tour guide and chauffeur. I met a couple from... Canada... that tried to talk me into staying a month in [laughs]... to go to Laos and to Cambodia and stuff like that. Said if I ever come back, that's what I should do. But it was--it was really interesting because when I was there, like I said, I was in a combat support unit, and I got a chance to see a lot of the country. We, uh... we took the longest convoy that had ever occurred over there. The unit that I was in. And we were in the place called Long Bin (?). And we drove all the way up to Cam Ranh Bay. Yeah. So that was... pretty amazing and it made the news in the Stars and Stripe (?). Matter of fact, we got interviewed for that--that--that. I met some great people. Um, to this day, I have... I'm still friends with, uh, young man that lives in Chester... that I met in Fort Cameron, Kentucky, when we were in basic. And we went from basic to AIT to the same unit in Vietnam. but he came back to the country before I did, because... I extended my tour so I could a early-out. He had to come back and go over there [laughs]... Fort Cameron, and I didn't wanna do that, I didn't want do any... any statesides (?) duty.

LB: Well it sounds like you... I mean, the tours were pretty long then.

HW: Well it was two-year, too.

LB: Yeah.

HW: Like I said, we were drafted.

LB: Right.

HW: So, it was just two years.

LB: But, '69 also, that was... that was a pretty intense time over there.

HW: That was the--that was the--after the tech--[?] there was a major tech that year.

LB: Yeah.

HW: Yeah. But see, I was just... I just got drafted... that year. When I got there, of course the Americans were leaving... at that time, the president were not telling the people that we were in Laos. But when I got there, first place I went to was a place called Cu Chi (?). And we were going into Laos, bringing the equipment back... that we--when we weren't supposed to be there, but... that's what it was [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.] So... I would love to hear a little bit more about Fulton and Kennedy--we both

live in Church Hill--

HW: Yeah.

LB: And I'm--I'm working on another project called "Growing up in Civil Rights Richmond--"

HW: Ok.

LB: Which is all about people who grew up and were active, you know, desegregating schools during the Civil Rights Era, so... it's something I'm--I'm really interested in, even though I know it's not GRTC.

HW: Yeah.

LB: But... I'd love to hear more about Fulton, and starting, you know--ending up at Kennedy. So you were at a different high school before Kennedy, right?

HW: Armstrong.

LB: Armstrong, yeah.

HW: Yeah. Yeah.

LB: And that was right before Armstrong was getting desegregated--

HW: Well, it was before--

LB: ... right... it was starting--

HW: See, blacks were going to Armstrong and you could walk...

LB: Yeah.

HW: Honestly, I went to--to all three high schools. See, my mom went to Walker. In the tenth grade, I went to Walker, to please my mom.

LB: Of course [laughs].

HW: And all my friends were going to Armstrong. And... I went to Armstrong the eleventh grade. Because everybody I grew up--that's where they were at, Armstrong. Kennedy opened up, air conditioned school? Hey, I'm gonna be in the first class to come out of Kennedy. Just go on over to Kennedy.

LB: So that's crazy! So--so every year you were in a different school [laughs].

HW: [Laughing] yep. Yeah. And, uh... you said far as growing up, uh, matter of fact, in '63,

'63... the march on Washington? We took a bus, not knowing what was happening... but we went up there, and it was hot. And I can remember we running around, all we wanted to do is eat popsicles and Dr. King up there speaking, but... I wasn't *there*.... But, you know, years later, it's like, man, you know, I shoulda been listening or something [laughs].

LB: So who took you to the march on Washington?

HW: Well, they had what they c--R-Cap (?).

LB: Yeah. Sure.

HW: And... they--they--they took... I--I found [my card?], it was either two buses or... two or three buses that they left from down on Lou--in Fulton, there was a street called Louisiana Street. That was, um... it was like the... nine--no, it wasn't the ninth. Six-hundred block. And I remember them leaving from there. And I remember we getting up there and it was hot, and we're running around. But we weren't... we weren't... focuses on what was happening.

LB: Oh, I know. Cuz I've got a thirteen-year-old daughter, and like...[laughs] you know...

HW: Yeah, that was over our head at the time.

LB: But your parents must've been pretty involved...

HW: Well, my mom and... Fulton--Fulton was an area where... um... like... Seventeenth and Main? When I was growing up, was a major area. You had... I can recall Pow... Pow Stores-- I'm talking about--that's the name of the store, was at Seventeenth--Seventeenth and Main, they sold shoes.... And you go around on Seventeenth Street, you h--you either had--you had the market, you had, um... all these--just little--little stores, I mean, it was a... a lot of Jewish stores, that's what they were... at--down that area. And that's--that's about basically as far as... as... we had to go. To shop. Now, course, up on Broad Street, you had Thalhimers and Miller & Rhoads, but we didn't--we didn't have to go up there till years later. And I was just telling... a supervisor that's uh... here now... that I remem--I can remember when Sears was downtown where Broadway... Cuz in '57, that's when Sears move up to Allen and Broad. And that's when they started to going out, you know--course, you got Willow Lawn after that. And even here over on the Southside... you had stores down on Hull Street, down at Eleventh and Hull, and then, the, um--they all moved out here to Southside Plaza, you had Thalhimers and Miller and Rhoads, right over here in the plaza. Had JCPenneys. And then of course, that's when they started moving out, you got Cloverleaf built up and... then the stores move out to Cloverleaf, and then when Chesterfield Town Center, they... moved out to Chesterfield Town Center. Now they're gonna be... further out there than me pretty soon. But... I can--and... in sixty... '69, I had a job at Kim Boyan (?) Rug Company. And I used to deliver rugs and pick up rugs, and I can remember going on West Broad... like Parham and Broad, up in that area, when it was... a field. And [laughs] now you got all that--them things out there. You know....

LB: I mean, I know, cuz I--I mean, I didn't move to Richmond till 1994, but... I used to drive out Broad Street and, you know, you'd hit farmland. Where now it's just... one mini mall--

HW: Yep.

LB: ...to the next.

HW: And--and I can recall going out there and... especially down there, you know, all down by, uh... Glenside area, all up in there? It wasn't--it wasn't anything down there.

LB: [Laughs.] I know and now that's practically, like, downtown... right?

HW: Yeah. Yeah.

LB: So... you get back from Vietnam... and you join--

HW: Ok. When I got back from Vietnam, the *day* I got back from Vietnam... after processing in in Oakland, California, I flew to Richmond... I caught a Groome cab... from the airport. And you had to report at the federal building. Well... that's what I did, I got to the federal building and I reported in. I had my duffle bag and everything and at that time, my mom then was living in Fulton. They were living in Fulton when I left. But my mom had s once moved to Soutside. But I caught the bus to Fulton, I went to my cousin's house. But the bus that I got on, the man-- the guy that was driving the bus named Bob Meyers (?)... I used to work with him at downtown paper company on Main Street. And he said, 'Man, they're hiring up there at the bus company.' And... right then, I went up to... it was up on Robinson Street then. I mean, Cary and Davis.

LB: Excuse me one second... [quietly to someone else] Hi.

Background: Hi, how are you?

LB: Good.

Background: Um... you have an operator coming in at twelve-- [to HW] how you doin'? At twelve.

LB: Yes.

Background: Mr. Barrett.

LB: Yes.

Background: I just wanted you to know he's a little hard of hearing.

LB: Thank you for letting me know.

Background: [Laughs.] So you're gonna have to talk a little louder.

LB: I appreciate that, thank you.

Background: Ok. You're welcome.

Benjamin: Sorry about that.

HW: Yeah. Uh, Bob told me that they were hiring. And I went right up to the company... you had to be twenty-one. I was only twenty. And I went and, uh, applied. It was, uh, superintendent at that time was, uh... uh... Mr. Woody. And you had, um, Mr. Hatchet (?). And they told me that, uh, they had a class... they had a class already in session. And for me to come back. And I came back, and [went?] the first of October, which--and my birthday is the 23rd of September, so I was twenty-one. I had turned twenty-one then. And from Sept--I mean, from October the first through October the twenty-second, I was in training for three weeks. And I've been here since.

LB: What was the training like?

HW: The training consist of, um... you was in class for... I think the first three days... cuz everything was different now, of course, you got different fare boxes and all that, but they--they went over... went over the fare boxes, they... they, uh... took you out into, uh... um... Byrd Park. And you drove around there and then he... he assign you to a, uh... an operator and you had to--you had to ride the route. And you had to come back with landmarks. And he would go over it, you know, like if I went out to... if I had a r--route and I had to go downtown and I would come back and if I had to make a right turn at Eighth and Broad and--which is the federal

building. I mean, the courthouse there now. I would have down there the courthouse as a landmark at Eighth and Broad and, you know, you had--and he would go over that the next day. And... it was three weeks, you would--you would drive or--you would ride with a driver... for eight hours, and then you had to ride a route after you got off. Um... I didn't have a car or anything, and my mom had moved to Southside on Sixteenth Street. And I--I had to walk. I had to walk.

LB: All the way from the old GRTC?

HW: I had to walk from 215 East Sixteenth Street... every day, for the three weeks that I was in training. Because when I had to report, like in the morning, at four, four-thirty... it's nothing running, no buses, my mom would get me up at two o'clock in the morning. And I walked... down, uh... Con--uh, Cowardin, across the Leigh Bridge and up Idlewood. Sure did. [Laughs.]

LB: [Laughs.]

HW: Raining and everything. And, uh... cuz I--I applied to--for a car... and they--they told me that I had not established any credit. And I to Ward's Volkswagon. And the salesman there said, 'I'm gonna see that you get a car, son.' And I got a 1972 Volkswagon. And paid for it in a year. You know, he... helped me get that car from the Bank of Virginia and I stayed a faithful customer to the Bank of Virginia... you know, of course they changed their names and everything, but... I'm still with them now. And it's--it's, uh, Wells Fargo now. But, uh....

LB: You must've really wanted the job--

HW: Yeah! You know--

LB: ...to be walking [laughs]--

HW: I sure did!

LB: ...for hours.

HW: I sure did. And, you know, well, I had just come back in the country and I've always worked, I mean, when I was growing up in Fulton, my role models were my uncles. And my uncles worked at--are you familiar with the Rocketts area down there?

LB: Mm hmm.

HW: Well, you know where--where they--they're condos now and they're called Cedarworks.

LB: Yeah.

HW: See, we lived right across the street from Cedarswork.

LB: Oh, ok, sure, I know where that is.

HW: And... we used to play over there, go all up in the rafters after pigeons and all that kind of stuff. Well, beyond Cedarworks, they have what they called the Fertilizer (?). Had a fertilizer plant. And that's where my uncles worked. And my uncles would collect drink bottles for us. My mom brought us a red wagon. And I would pull that red wagon down route five. To that fertilizer mill. My uncle had two burlap bags with--maybe one--for drink bottles in (?). I'll pull that... bottles back, get home, I had to wash them. Cuz it'd be out there win the fertilizer. And the man would give us a penny a bottle. But... You know if you got fifty cents, I mean, you was on top of the world [laughs], you know. And we would get up on--on-on, um... Saturday mornings and go to the A&P, the grocery store. To boys--we have our red wagon, we'd get up there and... position ourself, like, I gotta get up, you--if I knew you was getting up there at seven o'clock, I'm gonna get up there at six-thirty. Cuz I wanna be first in line. And I'll pull that wagon a mile... and you give me fifteen cent to a quarter, taking groceries home. That's when, you know, people buy groceries, and... that's what they used to do. And from there, I went--I worked in the grocery stores... you know, taking people's groceries home and, uh... in '64, President Johnson was in the White House. They had a--a program... and I worked down at the Vince (?) general supply (?) on the weekend. And was paying a dollar and... dollar and forty cent a hour. I worked down there on the weekends, I would ride the bus to--to Dupoint. And walk from Dupoint down to Vince--to Vince General Supply, which is further down... uh, Jefferson Davis. Uh... during the week, I worked at, um... Richmond Times Dispatch and Newsleader. They used to have us in there. Uh, Kodak used to have a little... magazine, little pouch that they had put in the Sunday's paper. And we would be in--we would go in on Wednesday and we would insert them into the--the papers, and then they would be in the Sunday's paper. And, of course when I got in high

school, I... I worked--I was in the DE program. I worked for, uh... a drug store... which they--
Dot's.

LB: What's DE stand for?

HW: Distributed Education.

LB: Ok.

HW: Yeah. They used to have a program like that. Um... I don't know if you would know--um,
well there was, um... mayor of Richmond one time, named, uh, Roy West.

LB: Sure.

HW: Yeah. Well, he was my DE teacher, he used to teach over in Armstrong.

LB: Really??

HW: Yeah. Yep. And he--he--you know, he'd send you out on a job interview, you know, you...
put your tie and everything on and... I remember I got a job in, uh... clothing store on Grace
Street.... They had two. It was a women's boutique. They had a store on Grace Street and they
had one on, um... at Willow Lawn. He was really impressed, I went on the interview and I got
that job [laughs].

LB: [Laughs] But Roy West, wow.

HW: Yeah.

LB: I didn't--I didn't realize he... he started off teaching high school.

HW: Yeah.

LB: I interviewed him way, way back, I don't know, it was like fifteen years ago now, for a project I did about the Carver neighborhood.

HW: Yeah. Yeah, he was--he was a teacher over at Armstrong High School. And, uh... from high school, I--I worked at Philip Morris for--a minute. Cuz that was the thing, you know, I worked at Philip Morr--see, I don't smoke or anything. And I worked at Philip Morris. And I would get so dirty, that I would walk from Maur--Maury Street... home. I walked to Fulton. Cuz tobacco... would be all on you--the job I had, they had these ladies separating tobacco leaves from this big barrel. And I have to get the straps up and take them down to the end of the conveyor and I would throw this stuff up on the tabey--conveyor building went up into this chopper. Well in doing that, course the stuff would fall back on me. And I went to work in did that and my nose started to bleed. and I went to the dispensary and the lady said that my nose was gonna stop. And I said, 'yes, ma'am it is. Cuz I'm outta here.'

LB: [Laughs.]

HW: [Laughs.] That was it. And that was in--that was in '69. Yeah. Cuz after I left--I left that job... I, uh... I worked at, uh... uh, Continental Can Company, which was a boxing... a boxing company. And at that job... I was the--what you call, like a packer. And they used to have us around the tables... for Taylor wine (?). Taylor wine, we'd get these displays, they would cut it out in cardboard boxes and... you had to stack these displays. And we were packing them. And they used to have... myself, I'm a young man, just got outta high school, and they had me around these older guys and they--they telling jokes. And I liked it, that, you know, cuz they telling their jokes. But they had us on a twelve-hour shift. And I came to work at three o'clock. And the supervisor came to me and told me that I wasn't gonna pack. He was gonna have me as a catcher. Behind this machine, well, the guy that ran the machine, they payed you bonus. You know, so he's got this cardboard... coming out of there, I mean, that cardboard coming and they give you these... uh, leather glove--leather straps that go up your arm, cuz cardboard like razor blade, it'll cut you up. And this cardboard things jumping out there and I'm stacking and... the guy running the machine, he's trying to get a bonus. I'm nineteen years--eighteen years old. I don't need no bonus, I don't have nobody, just me and I'm still at home. At--at five o'clock, they had a break, I went to the--the, um... the floor foreman, I asked him what was the name--was the number of that machine? Put that on my timecard, I walked on down the road, I went on back home. Told my momma, I said, 'they tried to kill your baby down there' [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.]

HW: But you could get jobs like that, I mean, cuz places were... right together, on Jefferson Davis Highway, you know, you... you could walk out one building and walk right into another one. And you know, it--jobs were there. I worked at ER Carpenter. I was in high school. Got off work at--at, uh... eleven o'clock. And... the guy that was supposed to be giving us a ride home had a flat tire. So we had to wait till the next shift got off, which was at two o'clock. Yeah. I lived in Fulton. We got a ride home, a friend and I got a ride home. And I think it may have been two forty-five, three o'clock, my mom said, 'you know you're going to school.' You know, cuz I was in school. Said, 'you know you're going to school, junior.' That was the end of that job [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.] But it sounds like it didn't matter cuz you could always just--

HW: No, it didn't. It didn't and then... like, and before I went into--got drafted, I worked at Kim Boyan Rug (?) company. That was the last job... that I had before I got drafted. They were on Grace Street, they sold oriental rugs... which I--I appreciated the owner, Miss Kim Boyan (?) because she used to tell stories, which I didn't realizes the oriental rugs tell stories, you know, and... she would... tell you what all these, some would stand for, and when the child labored, they were the more--more... valuable rugs and... and, going into some people' homes. I mean, they were trophies. I mean, they had them hanging up and everything. And we used to clean them. But then I got drafted. And that was... that was the last job I had before I got drafted and I came here.

LB: So wh--when you came back... see, yesterday, Bruce Korusek?

HW: Yeah.

LB: Who I'm interviewing next week.

HW: That's right.

LB: He sent me a photo of all the GRTC operators from 1965.

HW: Yeah.

LB: And it was like all white men--

HW: Yeah.

LB: ... two African-American men...

HW: Yeah...

LB: ...and one white woman. And that was it.

HW: Yeah.

LB: So when you were hired in 1970, who else was in training with you?

HW: Well...

LB: I--do you know what I mean, like--

HW: It was--it was--when I came, it was four women. It was two whites and blacks and when I--when I came. Um... the majority of operators were white at that time. The drivers that was in training with me... Bruce is ah--was right ahead of me. Bruce used to collect... memorabilia, and he--I mean, Bruce had a... huge collection. He had... I mean, he's--he... I don't know if he still has it, but he--he--

LB: I hope so. That would be great to see.

HW: He--he has... he used to... I was in a class with him and... this was back in the... early 80s or something like--Bruce have buses and--I mean, he has--he had a lot of stuff. He did.

LB: Yeah.

HW: But, um... um... when--when I came outta training, it was like, uh... you had a standards you had to meet. I mean, you couldn't... it's--it's different now. And I don' know if that's a good thing or a bad thing, but drivers seem to be back then, they... they were more disciplined and there was respect for things. Um... and you had to look a certain way, cuz when you came to

work... they had a--in the West End, I think they still have a huge mirror... when you--when you... you come in the door. And when you came in... they used to have the supervisor named Dave Hern (?). He'd be by that mirror. And, you know... di--you had to be right. I mean, you... no shirt, no--like, I see drivers now, which, uh, I guess it's the time. Shirt out their pants, and... you know, stuff like that. When you went up there to the window? And they gave you transfers... you was right. You know, cuz the dispatch is gonna--they're gonna look at you, like... he wouldn't give it to you. And it's--it's--it's different now. I mean, cuz... generations, I guess, but... Um... certain routes... a lot of people didn't--didn't like to work because they used to get a lot of... well, I don't know if you got complaints but people... it was Virginia Transit... see, when we came. And... it was a private company. People had stock in the company. So a lot of the stockholders lived on Grove Avenue up in that area in the Westhampton area. and if you worked those lines, you better be straight. I mean, cuz they [laughs]--they sure were gonna call up on you. But over the years, it's changed. you know, and downtown was... it was a busy... cuz you had the department stores down there and... you could come downtown in the afternoon... from... Ninth and Broad as far as you could see up to... First and Broad, be a line of buses. You know, cuz... people--it seemed like people rode buses then, you know, I don't--I don't... I--now, I mean, people... was out there. But you had--like I said, you had all those things downtown. You know, the bus stations and... you just had everything down there. And they--they had... express routes. But they weren't like the express routes now, you know, cuz you go to parking lots. But like, uh, Westhampton had them. Express run, uh... Chamberlayne. Um... Patterson line and on those express routes, they would pick up from--let's say if you were coming into town, and you were on the Westhampton line, it would pick up people from the University of Richmond down to the 3500 block. I mean, you'd pick up people all the way down Grove going

to--to get to the 3500 block. Once they got to the 3500 block, it would not stop and pick up anybody else on Grove Avenue unless someone was getting off... the bus. So, you know, it--it--it... shoot on down Grove Avenue. Now, when you were going back... in the afternoon, it would pick you up up until, like... what, it was, like, Henry... Henry and Broad, something like that. And... it would not--then, after that, it would not let you off until they got to the 3500 block. You know, and--and beyond. And the--one of the first... the first, uh, things that I didn't like about--I had a disagreement with a supervisor about it--I was working the Grove... 15, and I--I only went up to Thompson and brought--Thompson and Grove. And I'll never forget it, because I was scheduled to leave from up there at 8:13. Well, I'm scheduled to leave at 8:13... the express was schedule to be at Grove and Thompson... at 8:09. So he was ahead of me. But some mornings... he would be behind me. So when I left at 8:13, and made my little loop and got around on Grove Avenue --it's, uh, Crenshaw and Grove -- I picked up two people that was there, and I proceeded on. But because the other bus was running a few minutes late, he don't stop there anyway. So he came down and... you know, he... zipped on by. Supervisor came and told that I left a lady there. She said a bus went by so fast, you know, she didn't see it. But it was the express bus. Cuz I picked up two people and... tell that man died, me and that man-- [laughing] he never spoke after that.

LB: [Laughs.]

HW: Because--I had some choice words for him, you know, cuz I knew I didn't leave anybody and--

LB: Yeah.

HW: ... what--what the person had done, when they came walking up Crenshaw, the--the express buss, he doesn't stop in--he was gone! You know. She had already missed... the bus, the--the local one--

LB: Right.

HW: ...which was me. Yup.

LB: So what--what... else do you remember from those early days... of operating the bus, when you first started off in the, you know, seventy and the early seventies?

HW: Um... the--the, um... you talking about the way people were? Or...

LB: Any way you wanna take it.

HW: Um... we--we had a, um... the early--the early--the...seven--in seventy... seventy-one, well I started out the first route that I got... I work what you call an hour-bus. I had to come to work at 9:18 at night. And I worked till 6 o'clock in the morning. The buses ran all night then. And, of course, you had the, um... the, um, disco era going on, and all up in the VCU area... um, on Harrison Street and right there at Laurel and Broad, you had little disco places. Uh, on... on Main Street, the route that I had, I had to come down--down Broad. And I would come back up

Main. You had Wonder Bread. And I would be out there at night--[laughs]... uh... some nights, I mean, people would--really be riding. And other nights, it would be... so boring, I would pull into a bus stop thinking that I've seen someone standing there, but it would--and I would pull in the bus stop, open the door. And it would be the shadow of the telegram poles or something, I'm waiting for somebody... to come on and it was just a pole. But--but people would... would ride... and, um... ride in the mornings till they got out of the disco places down around three o'clock or so, guys would--catching the bus going to their Wonder Bread. You had Wonder Bread, and over there on Church Hill, you had that bakery. I mean, you had Nolde's Bakery right there at twenty... twenty, uh, six and Marshall. You know, that was a big thing then. Um... Church Hill area, cuz I went all--that's [when I/the way I] went all the way to Church Hill. Uh... that's [one of the major?] down there--see, you had... they also had what they call the Viaduct, which ran [beside] MCV. Which was Marshall Street. You had a--a bridge that went... went over there. But then they knocked that down. You had the old Ninth Street Bridge. But... we did--it was, uh... you had--you--and--you [?] have problems--some problems. People smoked a lot and, that's about the major problem that you would have. You know, someone smoking. You... yeah, that's what I used to have. I would have problem with--with somebody trying to smoke. Until they stop people from smoking on the buses.

LB: And generally speaking, what would you say are the best and worst parts of your job?

...And again, you can go back and forth in time--

HW: Um...

LB: ...whatever you wanna do with it [laughs].

HW: Personally, the best part for me was--was, uh... uh, when I was at the birth of my kids.

[Laughs.] On my job. Um, I have three kids. Three--two boys and a girl. Um... the... far as the--
the... worse in driving... we had a blizzard here in '96.

LB: I remember that.

HW: Um... now, we also had the, uh... when the hurricane came through, what was that, uh...?

Was that--

LB: Which one, we had so many of them.

HW: Well, you had the flood--we had the flood and--

LB: Gaston?

HW: ... yeah, that--well, that was major, too, Gaston, and um... one that really tore down the
West End. What was that one?

LB: Was that Florence? There was so man--doesn't it seem like there was a bunch of years,
where every year--

HW: Yeah.

LB: There'd be a huge hurricane and it would knock out the power in Church Hill for a week
[laughs].

HW: [Laughs] Uh... we, uh.... The best.... The--I--I would think that the company change from private to... to the city in--in Henrico and Chesterfield and... seventy... seventy-f... I think it was seventy-four or seventy-s--seventy-four. Because in seventy-six, that's when we went on strike.

LB: Tell me about the strike.

[Both laugh.]

HW: The strike consist of... uh... we had to--as an employee, we had to work... we walked the picket line for two hours. Two hours on and two hours off. And it was started in... it was the end of... it was the end of the year. '76, I know, because... it affected Thanksgiving. And I think it was going into... Christmas.

LB: What was the strike about?

HW: It was about, um... Wasn't about wages, it was about work conditions and... and wages probably was involved, too. Um... I do re--recall after the strike, a lot of drivers... well, it wasn't

a lot--some drivers came from the tidewater area, came up... and, uh...

LB: You mean scabbing or--?

HW: No. Well--

LB: Or just--

HW: ...they--they came... they... I--I knew about four people... I knew after the strike, that's when they came to--to the... the company. Cuz that's when I met 'em.

LB: Did you win the strike?

HW: Yeah.

LB: That's good.

HW: We won the strike, yeah. We had a pretty good, uh... union president at that time named-- well... [laughs]. His name was Archie [Iddings?]. And he... he had a policy where, you know... let's say if the... superintendent was called [him/them?] into the office, Archie would meet you at the door and say, 'don't worry about it, um...' sit down, have a seat, and they'll go in and have a cup of coffee and he'd come back and tell you what... what [happened?] [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.]

HW: And he was into politics because he used to stay down the General Assembly. He would, you know, have whatever... deal that they seem to--they think that was... best interest to transit employees, he would lobby. He was... pretty good into lobbying. But I think Archie was like the president when the union started, and I think they started here in, like, '47. I don't think they had a...

LB: I think they were unionized from the very, very beginning.

HW: Oh, really.

LB: But it may have been, like, 1880s--

HW: Well I know--I know the buses--I know they didn't switch over to buses, I think it was like in forty [?]-forty-seven.

LB: So maybe it was, like, the trolley workers union.

HW: Yeah. Yeah, and he, uh... cuz Bruce got that, too, and see, where I lived in Fulton, tracks were in front of--in front of our houses down there. Um... then we went from there, and of course things change, you know, you got... you got, um... the whole race complex of the company, you know, started to change. And it was more blacks and a lot of whites starting to

retire. And, um... then, then in... um... in '75, I--I applied for a job in the, uh... scheduling department. And at that time, it wasn't any blacks upstairs, it--on Davis Street. And I was in the scheduling department. And I went in--into this job... and I was, like, a passenger counter. I had to... count passengers. It was--it was in the summer. '75. They would send me out on... different location--I might be at twenty-first and--and Broad. And I would be out there and I would count passengers, when the buses come by. And the way that we were doing this--let's say a bus was a forty-five passenger bus, and... when the bus came by me and I saw four people standing up... that's forty-nine people. You know... that's the way I--I would write it down. Well, I did that... and I would be all over and I mean, I would be somewhere like Tenth and Main and out there in the heat and I was... then when I was out there in--in the street... I was dying to get in. Cuz when I got in, I had to tally all this up and then when I was in... I was dying to get back out.

LB: [Laughs.]

HW: You know. The--the three men that I w--that... there was... it was three men... and a lady that I worked with upstairs. They would--they were good people. Well, Reed, the guy that was head of the department, he was--he used to drink. But, uh, I was dying--when I was out, I was dying to get in. And... vice versa. So I had worked the job, I think it was like eighty... it was in the eighty--eighty-some days. So I went back to... Mr. Woody and I told him that, uh, you know, I--I don't--I don't like this. He said that if I stay 90 days, I would lose my seniority in the transit, but I wouldn't lose it... in the company. You know. So on the eighty-eighth day, I [laughing] gave them a letter, like... I'm outta here, no, I'm going--I'm going back down stars. And that's... and there for a while, they didn't have [laughing] anybody else up there. They had somebody

doing it, but they didn't have--wasn't another black guy doing it. That was in 1975. And I went to J. Sergeant Reynolds... Yeah, I was going to J. Sergeant Reynolds as student then. And I, uh... got a degree in--associate degree in business management. That's what I did. But... it was... it was--it--it, you know, it's had your--had your ups and down in the company, but... overall, it's been good to me. Yeah. Cuz I worked forty-one years, two months, and ten days.

LB: Wow.

HW: Full-time. Uh, but things have changed--we used to have... uh, safety awards. Well, we--they still give safety awards. But they used to give us banquets. We used to go, you know, to... see a play down here Swift Creek (?), uh.... Where else we used to go... They would rent somewhere and, man, you know, you have your wife or your significant other there. But they don't do that kinda stuff anymore. I guess cuz of the budget, but...

LB: That's too bad.

HW: Yeah, they don't do that anymore.

LB: So... can I take you back for a second, to the earlier seventies, when you're talking about Henrico and the counties kinda changing--

HW: Yeah.

LB: ...their structure? Was that all about annexation?

HW: Yeah. See, in... with the first--the first route that we went into far as annexation... was, um, st--um... out there at Stonypoint. Yeah, because that's--that's part of the annex area. Right there at Huguenot?

LB: Mm hmm.

HW: Over there. And the first runs that my--what they did, they took... four drivers... yeah. It was four. Bruce Korusek, myself, a driver named Harold [Carl/Carr?], and W. T. Roy. We were the four drivers. That--that had that route. I had a run that I worked Hull Street in the mornings. I worked a split run. And because I was one of the drivers, they took the second part of the run that I had... and gave me... a trip out there. That's all I had to do. I came to work in the morning, I got off something like ten o'clock in the morning. I went to class... in between that time, I might've had... almost six hour break. And all I had to do was come back in the afternoon and make that trip out there.

LB: Just that one single trip.

HW: Yeah, at that time, because they wanted someone that was responsible and reliable and the... you know, I guess the good public relations, but, it was--I remember it was the four of us, cuz Bruce, myself, Roy--W.T. Roy and Harold Carr. And then, uh... they acquired... Nine Mile Road. Cuz that was s private company... at first that had that. And then we started running us

down there because the bus that they had, the first bus that they had out on Nine Mile Road had the--just the door in the front. Cuz passengers, they had to come... like a coach bus, they had to board in front and get off at the front. Then that's when they started to having, you know, your park-and-rides, which was Glenside, I think, Glenside was the first park-and-ride that they had. And then Parham... Then, of course, you know, you got Gaskin, now, and you got Whiteoaks and you got... Wendell (?) Park and... and you got, uh, Chesterfield Town Center.

LB: It just seems like when annexation happened, you know, that's when everyone got kind of crazy. That's when they stopped letting the city buses into the counties, right?

HW: Yeah. Well, we--we weren't going--we weren't... we weren't going... we had--we used to go out in Lakeside area... Yeah. We didn't go that far out, like we do now. It didn't go... we used to go... into--to like... one--one or two blocks into--to Chesterfield. Because, see, Chesterfield... like, there--on Jefferson Davis is--was down there by Dupoint.

LB: Mm hmm.

HW: And you would--you would go in and make a loop and come right on back out. Um... years later, after that, you know, Chesterfield got this grant. And then they had a little... bus system itself out there.

LB: Ok.

HW: You know we--we...we drove the buses and everything but because Chesterfield had gotten this grant, you know, we--we had routes out there. But once that grant money was gone, Chesterfield like, 'no, we're not gonna do this.' They said that it wasn't feasible. And they--matter of fact, they changed the hours on the buses because when they first started running the bus out... to Pemberton and Broad, that bus used to run at night. And because of the budget or whatever, everything had to be out of the county by seven o'clock. You know, so... if you went to Regency, you had to leave Regency at, like, six... six forty-five, you had to be back at Three Chopt and Patterson... you know, by seven o'clock.

LB: Wow.

HW: Cuz we--for some reason we--well they said it was the budget.

LB: Well, the counties...

HW: Yeah [laughs]--

LB: ... have their own--

[Both laugh.]

HW: Yeah, so...

LB: So, over the years, Mr. West, what have been the most challenging moments... of... of your job operating the bus?

HW: [Pauses] Uh, well... [pauses] I come from a background of, you know, big equipment. So, I--I... pretty much didn't have any... any challenge with... the bus itself. But over the years our equipment has changed. Because we started--when I started, the buses weren't--no power-steering and... buses didn't have air condition. Uh, buses did not have a--a mirror on the right side. Um... it was--tricks that you had to--to imply--you know, you're making a right turn, um, you had to be, you know, what, about three feet from the curb before you make your right turn. You was always aware that--not gonna let anybody get in between you and the curb. so you wouldn't... you know, r--cut over on anybody. That was the--what the, uh, mirror on the right side. And you could adjust the rearview mirror... in the bus... cuz buses had windows all the way down and one in the back. You know, you could adjust that so you could see on that side. Um... they were, like I said, they were not power-steering. And... the few buses that... did have air condition... the guy that assigned buses had his favorites, so they got the buses [laughs].
Uh...

LB: You know, or just in terms of any incidents that have ever happened or--

HW: Well--

LB: ...crazy stuff or...

HW: Course, you know, I had incid--incidents. I had incidents where people would be intoxicated and I had fights on the bus. Uh... short the f--short of fare. Uh, transfers expire. Just don't wanna pay at all. And you know, I had people who... they get up, they got a--you the first person that they see and they had a bad night, so they... they vent... that on you, you know. I didn't do nothing, I didn't sleep with them or nothing, so they.... And then you have a lot of people that--that has been really nice, respectful. I mean... you have passengers that... you work certain lines, they--they--they may bring you treats, um.... Overall people--they be good! Uh, that's if you stay... you're the type of driver that like to stay on the same route, which I'm not. I--I'm--I work what they call the 'extra board' So I prefer to change every week, if not every day. Cuz after two weeks... I mean, personally, I'm pretty bored with... the--the--that particular route. And I like long routes. I don't like... a route that... like VCU and went from the I-lot to the hospital, you know, I don't... I prefer... if I leave the end of the line at 9 o'clock, I don't wanna get back till 11 o'clock. You know. Just take that long just to go from one end to the other. And, um... the... I mean, people... that--I think... well, you know they had some... some major crimes committed on the bus, if you... talking about incident because, I think... one passenger got mad with another passenger for... kicking him and then he came back on the bus and he... he stabbed the passenger and... that happened. And then you had a shooting incident up there at... Shafer and Broad, a young lady was driving the bus and... someone shot through the bus and... you know.... Bus, um... I think--course you had the incident where the young lady was ran over by the bus.

LB: You know, it was funny, I was--I was talking to some people who... went to George Wythe-

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HW: Mm hmm.

LB: ... during the, you know, the busing time before they had school buses--

HW: Yeah, we used to--

LB: ...so they were taking--

HW: ...we used to do that, too. We used to run, you know, what they call school charters. You pick the kids up after school, and you take them to the neighborhood that they were going to.

LB: See, they didn't even have that, they had, like, three transfers--

HW: Yeah.

LB: The one guy I talked to, he--he grew up in Church Hill and he--took him two hours to get down to Wythe every day.

HW: Yeah.

LB: But some people there, who were kids then, talked about getting their buses shot at going down Hull Street. Have you ever heard anything like that?

HW: Well I [haven't?] heard that they--over in the old [?] area--

LB: ...like by a motorcycle gangs, you remember those gangs on Hull Street?

HW: Yeah, you had the, uh [laughs]... the Pa--uh, what they call it?

LB: The Pagans.

HW: Yeah.

LB: And the Confederate Angels...

HW: Yeah, that was--that was all in Oregon Hill.... [Pauses] This is Richmond! This is... this is--and this a commonwealth state, and.... When I was growing up, people still fighting the Civil War, you know, so [laughs]... and then some--you--well, you know, you... I don't know if you got used to it or was--or you was--it was just something that maybe you accepted. Because like in the Fulton area... when we got to, like... Thirty-seven and Louisiana where the bus turned at-- I mean, that's where, that was like the end of the line. All the blacks lived--that was as far as the blacks went. Was Thirty-seventh and Louisiana, far as the bus--and the bus would go up on the hill. And... the only time we like go to Powhatan Park is when it snowed and everybody be sleigh riding. Now, course... we didn't have any sleighs. But what we did have was the hood of a car, we would drag the hood of the car up, come down the hill. And I can recall in 1962, I read

an article in--in the, um, Time--in the Richmond News Leader. That they was giving swimming classes at the Y, right there at Foushee and--and Franklin.

LB: Mm hmm.

HW: And I went down there, and I... till I came back--when I came to his bus company, I went down there and the man told me, said, 'can't take no swimming lessons here, you go around there on Leigh Street.' They ain't have no swimming pool around on Leigh Street for blacks. I was twelve. I came here to this bus company, was driving the Forest Hill bus, that man caught my bus at Forty-third and Forest Hill. And this was... this was in '62. This had to be like, seventy... seventy-seven or seventy-eight. And I remember that man. Telling me that I couldn't--and so when I went to J. Sergeant Reynolds... I took swimming and I could swim. And they was giving it at the Y and soon as I got down--I don't know if you ever been to the pool down at the Y.

LB: Yeah.

HW: When you walk down the steps, and stand over top of the pool, I jumped off the rail into the pool. Just because.

[Both laugh.]

HW: Yeah.

LB: Did you say anything to that guy when he came on the bus--

HW: No...

LB: ...in seventy-seven?

HW: I didn't say--I didn't say anything to him but I do recall I pulled up the handbrake. The--the bus I was driving had a handbrake... right here, and I do remember pulling the handbrake up on it. No. He--he ain't probably remember me. But I remembered him. And, uh... you--you... it was like that, I guess. See, in Fulton, in--in, uh, sixty... they had--they had--it was the early sixty--might've been sixty-one. Think it was the summer of sixty-one. Um... right there on the river, they had... Crowns, um... gas.

LB: Mm hmm.

HW: They had gas tanks down there and those tanks blew up. The barge down on the railroad caught fire. And it must've been like two o'clock in the morning. And we ran... from [laughs]--from our house, we were living at 29 Louisiana. We ran all the way to the entrance to Byrd Airport--it's Richmond Airport now. That was--that was--I tease my momma about that now, when we--when we were, uh... we have Thanksgiving dinners and we'd be sitting around reminiscing. But we ran from there... to the entrance to Byrd Airport. And... I'll never forget when we were... going up the hill on--on Louisiana, this car was on the street. One tank exploded and a huge ball of fire went up in the air. And people just screamed and everything

cuz... the way gas does, it--you know, it burns out the fume or something, but it look like that-- that huge ball was gonna drop down. But the whole sky lit up. And I've been down to Fulton when the flood, hurricane Camille came through. And the only time we--we never had to... leave our home because of the flood. But, you know, streets and everything ws blocked off down there. And... I could walk out of the house and walk right... right to the [river?], I mean... we were right there. That was in sixty... sixty-eight.

LB: Sixty-nine, or--?

HW: Sixty... sixty-nine, yeah. It--yeah, Camille came in sixty-nine.

LB: So what have your most memorable experiences been while you've been operating the bus?

HW: ...Best thing I can remember is, um... I met my wife [laughs].

LB: Yeah, tell me about that.

HW: Um... I was working a, uh... I was working... at, uh, Main Street... Main Street, um... 13 line. And... I was picking up this young lady that worked down on, uh... Ninth--Ninth and, uh, Cary. Yeah. I think she worked Nin--yeah, she worked in a building at Ninth and Cary. And I would pick her up... and she would get on and... never said anything, was always reading. And get off at the library at Ellwood and... and, um Belmont. So she had been doing that--I don't know... I guess about a month before I said anything to her [laughs]. And--while I--I think I... I,

uh... I said something about her hair, cuz I think I said--I asked her was that a wig she was wearing. This was in... and she was telling... and that was the wrong for me to say [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.] I can't imagine why [laughs].

HW: But that was just to get the conversation started. That was in... cuz I had a--I had a... a Porsche. I had a sportscar, a Porsche 924 and you couldn't tell me nothin', I was hot [laughs].

LB: [Laughs.]

HW: And, uh, I, uh... I asked her out. From--and from there, yeah. We--we... she lived--she--she used to get off at--at, uh, Belmont and... unbeknown to me... she was w--just waiting for me to say anything because she could've caught the other bus.

LB: [Laughs.]

HW: I mean, you know, she was just waiting. You know. And, uh... cuz she--she still--when she got off the bus, another bus went right by her house and she had to walk from where she was getting off, you know, but... being a young man, I was... and we have... two fantastic kids.

LB: Well, that's pretty memorable.

HW: Yeah! I--I remember that, you know, I--I remember saying something about her hair, I

knew that.

LB: [Laughs.] Can you give me an example of good exp--leadership that you've experienced?

And again, you can take that question...

HW: Well... anywhere you wanna take it.

HW: Well, we--we've had--I've--I've experienced some... some good, some real good leaders here. And I've had some bad. The one that I was telling you about, the... incident with the lady. Well... it was--it was a black and white thing. I mean... I'm like--I don't like you to come and accuse me of something before you know all the facts and because of that... that's the way he was, and then I ne--never had to say anything else to him ab--about anything. And... we've had leaders here that... like Mr. Coles, I mean, I can remember when--when he was a driver and--and he became, um... training supervisor and he went in... cashiers office and... I mean, you know, just--just going on up. Um... the... the leadership in the early seventies... they were--they were--they were... they were strict people, you know, they--they had their rules, but... um, if you followed the rules and... and... being respectful, I mean, you--you came to work like you supposed to, you know, you didn't have any problems. But over the years, you found out that someone was... they had some issues. I mean, because, like the guy Dave Hern (?)... something was wrong with him. I mean, he--he--he really was... way off the hook, you know, so... um... the--the older supervisors that they had... you know, they--they would--they would, um... they had their--their pets, you know, because... this company was, like... like I said, I--I like to work different runs every day. And when I first got here... you had to be on top of your game as far as

what's happening. Because we used to have what they call show-up, we still do, we have show-ups. And... the company was not paying you, but half of whatever the salary was at that time. And... if you didn't get anything, you know, you just outta work. You didn't--you just didn't work. So let's say I--I caught (?) a show-up, and the... particular supervisor, dispatcher'd be up there... if you were not at the window, and watching... what he does... you wouldn't get no work. Because... he--he--he just was like that. He was... he just was like that. He--he left here and went to Pollard (?) and... that wasn't too soon. He went to Pollard transportation. But so, like, if... if--if I--if I... caught a show-up, and he was in there, you staying up the window because that guy... he know you back there, he not gonna... he not gonna get you to work, he gonna... he'll...call his friend at home or something and--and... get him people to work. Then you had a supervisor... which I respect to this day, he gonna retire and he lives over there on Laburnum, his name is Earl Daniels.... He was strict on everybody. I don't care what color or nothing. He... he would--he was... and a lotta people that know him now respect him because of that. He didn't care who you were, I mean... he'd dot all of his I's and cross all of his T's. He was just like that. And--and I respect that and--and to this day, Earl is--is a older gentleman and if I see him out in the yard, you know, if I see him at the ballgame or something you, know... we were not--were never buddy-buddies, but, you know, I respect him because of the way he was. I mean, Mr. Coles will tell you, anybody. Earl was something, he... you know, he... he didn't care if you... like, we have to report ten minutes prior... if I had to be to work at ten o'clock, if I'm scheduled to leave the garage at ten o'clock, I gotta be here by nine-fifty. Not nine-fifty-one. Not--not... no nine... fifty... and seconds. I gotta be here at by nine-fifty. Now... Earl'll be looking at that clock and... you come in here, you know, 'well I ain't but a minute late.' You late! Period, I mean, not by a minute or nothing. And Earl was... you know, just like that with everybody. You

didn't [get to your work?]. . . somebody--he'll call somebody else from the back. And the same way, like, if I was out on the street, which they don't do too often now. If you have to report out on the street, you have to report there ten minutes prior. And the only way--when I pull into the bus stop, if you're scheduled to relieve me. . . I'm not supposed to be looking up and down the street for you. . . if you just coming to work. The only time that you should not being there is inclement weather. Other than that, you're supposed to be there. So you can't. . . if you scheduled to be there at ten o'clock, and I'm scheduled to be there at--at, uh. . . 10:02, I'm talking about you're scheduled to relive me, you know, at 10:02. . . you can't--you can't just--just. . . I'm sitting there at 10:02 and here you come loafing down the street, because you already late, see you supposed to been there at ten minutes prior. And you have a lot of that. . . that going on now in these--some drivers now, they thing that that's ok, but. . . it didn't use to be like that.

LB: So what are the biggest moments of change been in your job. . . over time?

HW: The routes. The routes have changed. Uh, ridership. . . ridership is--is different--now you have your peak times. But back in the seventies and the early eighties, the--the routes were. . . were connected. Like the Ginter Park and the Forest Hill, they were the same route. Hull Street, Highland Park, they were the same route. Um. . . and you had routes that you no longer have now and you had the [Cary 9?], across towns, the Lafayettes the Marlin Cities, which was over there on Church Hill, they and a bus that just ran around in Church Hill. Yeah. We had the Fulton Government Road buses. You had, uh. . . the Country Club. Um. . .

LB: The Country Club had a bus?

HW: Mm hmm! Sure did! Sure had a bus ran from--from the Northside, you know, out there to the Country Club and it had, um... it went up Belmont and Westover. See, you could go across the, uh... the, um, Boulevard Bridge then. The--

LB: Cuz now it's so hard to imagine anyone at the Country Club taking a bus [laughs].

HW: Well, it--it--it was workers going out there.

LB: Yeah. Yeah.

HW: It was workers. I mean, you know, you had--you had a lot of, uh, day workers and then, uh, ladies that were... you know, cleaning houses and stuff were going out there. They would ride out to, uh... to River Road and--and people would--you'd pick them up down there and... um, you had a lot of that. Because that's--those lines were really heavy lines as far as... as--as ladies riding it.

LB: Mm hmm.

HW: Because, uh... you talking about memorable moments, I mean... you work that line and the ladies would get on the bus and they'd be talking and talking. And they be talking about the kids and everything. I just sat there, 'they sure love their kids.' But they'd be talking about the soap operas, you know, I [laughs]... And, you know, and then they would be talking and they'd be

talking and they say... 'my lady.' And you's like, 'who's that lady?' and that'd be the lady that come down to pick them up, you know. They--they... and... uh, one lady was telling me that... that, uh... she was--she was... she was at work one day and she had went upstairs and--and, uh, she had fell asleep. But she was running the vacuum cleaner. And when she--she came downstairs, the lady told her say, 'you really clean up--up there today. That vacuum been going all day.' She said she had fell asleep up there, running the vacuum. Just comical stuff. Uh... and--and they, uh... it's--it's... people... they were going to work, I mean... I--I've met people... that... they were--they were kids. I've seen them grow up, have kids, their kids. I've seen them now, you know, and... I mean, people will see me and they--they'll recall when--when I drove... them to hospital or something and I'm like, 'When?' She said, 'Yeah, I was working at the hospital and you was driving at night.' But you're talking about forty years, you know, I don't recall but they did. Uh... I--I--I do remember when I turned the corner at, um... when I first started driving, I was driving the bus... big old GM bus. I stopped at--at the bus stop there on Twenty-first street. And--and I opened the door and the lady told me to go ahead on. Told me I was too young.

[Both laugh.]

HW: Yep. Told me to go ahead on. I weighed--I got out of the military, I weighed a hundred and fifty... fifty-two pounds then. Yeah. 'You go right ahead.' Cuz I was the littlest thing up here.

LB: So how does the--how has the bus ridership changed over time?

HW: It's--I think it's down. But it may not be... because it's so scattered out... now. Um... it used to be when--when all those stores were downtown, it was the mecca, and... to me, it just seemed like it was a lot more people. I mean, Broad Street used to be packed with people. You know going... back and forth across the street because you had everything down there. And now that it's nothing there, you don't... you... you know, I don't see it. But... I only work two hours in the morning. You know. And then I'm working Forest Hill. I go to Walmart and I go to Chippenham Hospital.

LB: How about the kinds of people that take the bus, has that changed over time?

HW: It's changed, it's changed. I mean, you got... you know... all the foreigners. I mean, uh, the language has changed out there. Um... the... geographics (?) of the--of the area is different now. I mean, because... you know, like, certain parts of Hull Street, you have your Hispanics and--and Jefferson Davis area, you got that down there. Um... you may go in... some parts of Henrico. You know, you have your, uh... Indians or something up there. And... course you know, you... some parts of Broad, you got the Vietnamese, and you... um... that's--that's changed.... But it's... it's been, it's been good. For me [laughs]. It has. I mean, and I can't--

LB: It sounds like it's been interesting.

HW: I can't--I can't, I mean... with any job, uh, I can't say that this has been a bad job because... I haven't gone anywhere. I mean, I--I--I have... I was gonna leave once. I applied at UPS, and I'll never forget another driver and myself, we applied at UPS and we went up to, um... the Holiday

Inn up there on, uh, Staples Mill. And the guy interviewed us. And he told us, he said, uh, 'this is gonna be seasonal. This job is seasonal work.' And he was like, 'ya'll shouldn't leave.' And I didn't. And I applied at, uh, Reynolds and I was interviewed down there on Seventh... Seventh and Bainbridge. And the guy that was doing the--doing the interview asked me about Archie. The [laughs] the president of the [local there?], and I don't know... I told him that I knew Archie. And he hired this other driver named Johnson. And I think Johnson, he finally retired from it. But he had... some relatives down there. And those were the only two places.

LB: That's so interesting, cuz I was talking with Frank Tunstall yesterday--

HW: Yeah.

LB: ...and he had that long career at Reynolds.

HW: Yeah. Yep.

LB: Before coming here.

HW: And, uh--well, when I was in high school. When, uh... the used to come--now I don't know if they still do it now or not, but just before, uh, graduations... companies used to come. And they would--would, um... you know, you could apply and whatnot. And I got--I applied and was--they took me to, uh--well, I had to go down to Dupoint for a physical. And I went down to Dupoint for this physical. And after the physical, they called me in the guidance counselor office.

And that was like, something wrong! And they told me that I had a abnormal spine. The physical that they gave me at Dupoint, I have never had a physical like that to this day. But they said that I had a abnormal spine. And then I got drafted. And I couldn't figure that out. [Laughs.] But at that time, that job required a lot of bending and lifting and something like that, and when... when--when... I guess when they was x-raying me and they had me squatting or something, they--they detected that... something about the spine. But...

LB: So what kinda changes have you seen in the GRTC... since you got here in 1970?

HW: You speaking of, um...

LB: Again--anything... anyway you wanna take the questions. I always ask these big, broad general questions so you can take them anywhere you want.

HW: I--I--I've seen the... the leadership change. I've seen, um... it go from... really employee-friendly... to... not employee-friendly, on one hand. You know, and back to employee-friendly. Um... when I came--can't think of the guy that was in--CEO... cuz Mr. Church came after him.... Can't think of that guy...

LB: And is Mr. Church the one that was there during the strike in '75?

HW: Yeah. Yeah, he was--he was... yeah... Henry Church. It was Church, but it was--it was someone right--before Mr. Church, though. Can't think of his name.

LB: And then who was there when you didn't have a contract for two years, from 2009 to 2011?

HW: Lewis (?). Yeah. Which, he's down in--down in, uh--excuse me--Florida now. He's down in, uh... Orlando.

LB: Ok.

HW: Uh, and you had, uh... Rilo/Rollo (?). You had Church, Rollo... Uh, Lewis... yeah, then Mr. Coles. But there was someone before that.

LB: So it sounds like basically the change was, sometimes much more positive towards the workers, sometimes less positive.

HW: Yeah.... But, see... I wouldn't say the... it's politics, you know, this is--this is government subsidized and--and... way the economy was up, you know, and when the economy down. You have to understand that, you know, they have to go before city council and ask for things and... and... the money is not there... you know... but... course I don't wanna hear that, but...

[laughs], I can understand it, you know. Politics. Um... There's just like when--when, uh... when, uh... the Doug Wilder, you know, was the mayor, um, they increased the fare. And... you know, part of his campaign... you know, he--he said he was gonna... turn the fare back. Well, they increased it by a quarter, I think that's what they did.

LB: Was a lot then.

HW: But they needed that quarter.

LB: Yeah.

HW: And when he turned that fare back... he--it--it--it... it--it hurt things, because they've been in the red, I know. Had they--now, I'm not saying had--had he not done it, but it--it--he should not, I don't think.

LB: Yeah.

HW: As a operator, he should not have done that, but that was part of his campaign. You know, and... he did--he did it! But he--he--he... turned the fare back. But they didn't increase... what they were giving... the company itself. You know, so...

LB: That's a problem.

HW: And then, you know, you had the economy and the way gas went up--diesel--I mean, diesel went up, and... it just was a mess. That's what came about with the, uh... the contract--not having the contract. Cuz, the dollars weren't there, and it wasn't that the drivers were asking for... for, um... wage increase. You know, it--like any job, you know, you're asking for benefits, I mean... you don't have to give me fifteen cents. But I don't want you to take... something that

I've already got from me, you know. You--insurance going up. You're not gonna give me fifteen cents, then my insurance gonna go up thirty cents. You know, I'm--I'm working backwards here, and, um.... that's what it was about. I mean... and they--you know, little--little things! Like a personal day... uh, anniversary day... Because, see a lot of those things were not in existence when I--when I first came. So you do get your--you know, your birth--your birthday, uh, you get two... two, uh... anniversary days--two annual leave days a year. But they gave you a lotta... of somewhat incentives, like... perfect attendance. You--you... perfect attendance, they were giving you things, they don't do that now. I mean... fifty dollar... gift card. I don't seem like much, but it was a lot to me, I used to look forward to that, you know. Then when they stopped, I still got perfect attendance, but you don't get those things no more. Uh... they just took a lotta little things away, but... it's all economy.

LB: Yeah, it's not good.

HW: Yeah.

LB: How do you think in general the perceptions are in Richmond -- of riding the bus?

HW: Um...

LB: And how do you--how do you think that's changed over the years?

HW: I--I think--I think... it's... passengers... not all passengers... are not respectful to other

passengers. And... with the cell phone, and... and... just... just the way that you--you respect. There used to be a time, a man got on the bus and... a lady standing up, the man would get up. Lady sit down. They help one another.... I wouldn't... all the swearing and everything, because it's--it's everywhere, I mean.... They're on the phone, they... they--I don't know where the person at, but they arguing and fussing and everything and--and.... I mean, just totally disrespectful to--to everybody. And but if--for an operator, then let's say someone gets on the bus and is acting like that, and then I... I in turn, say something to the person... and then... they tell me, like, 'well I don't care nothing about you' or nothing. But so I stop. And I'm doing it because I'm--I feel like they're being disrespectful to you. Now you mad at me! Because you wanna get to your--your destination, but I gotta wait till... you know, supervisor, communications, somebody come. So now, you know, I'm--I'm--I'm stuck in a hard place. I mean, I'm trying to do the right thing... to--to eliminate this. But now--you getting--you--all [irate?], 'how long you gonna be here?' You know, like... well I shouldn't have said anything. So you just tune it out. Because I--I've and incidents where--where a lady--a lady came up to me and said that--'they swearing back there.' You know... the--the two people that were back there... they were talking to one another. And she's back there... as a passenger, she's back there where they are. she came up to me, she walked from the back of the bus to the front of the bus and told me, they swearing back there. So she said, 'What are you gonna do about it?' And I said, 'Well, I'm getting off at Robinson and Broad, that's what I'm gonna do--I was at Allen and Broad then--that's what I'm gonna do. But see, she was back there and she could hear them. You know. And--and it was--they--they probably was saying things that... they should not have been saying. You know for the lady, like... she might've been religion thing with her, you know. But it--I don't know. I don't know what to do, I mean, because... let's say if I had stayed right there, I'm scared to get off at

Robinson and Broad which is, like, four blocks away? And I stay here, they tell me, said, 'well wait till communication come.' You trying to get off up there. You trying to go somewhere. And then I got somebody up there waiting to get the bus and now I'm--I'm sitting here waiting, I might be there a half-an-hour, [?] leave late. And then when he does get the bus... where you been? People gonna be saying something to him, and you--you know, you.... I just go on on up here. Let somebody else deal with that. You don't wanna do that, but those things happen.

LB: What else can you do, right?

HW: Yeah. You know and... people--but people... people used to--used to intervene on stuff like that because... a kid or somebody act up, you know, they would--they would step in, like, hey, no, you getting'--not gonna do this, you know. Cuz we got to go to work, you know. Get you on off, here. But they don't--they don't do that now, but uh.... It's just that... I--the respect thing is definitely gone, because... it's everywhere, I mean, it's--it's in the--all the music. I mean, they--they just say anything and everything... well, when I was growing up, you--you wouldn't hear a kid--especially around [?] older person say things. You know, you just... just didn't do that. Now, when--when the fellas down there in the creek or something... they may say something, but when they got around someone grown, they didn't--they just didn't do that. You know, but... they do now. And it's not just n--the guys, it's the females, too, you know, so.... Sometime they worse than the guys. And a lotta times they are.

LB: So how do you think your job has changed your view of the city, Mr. West?

HW: Well, um... I think Richmond is--is a fantastic place. Lotta history here. Lot. Lotta history. Person come here, they're interested in... arts... um... all kinds of history, I mean, you can go... we used to give a, uh--a tour... and I--I used to really enjoy driving this trolley that they used to--we used to originate at the Science Museum. This lady... tour guide was from, um--she taught at a school over there off of, um... Brookland Park. There's a school over there. I used to really enjoy riding with her because... she would--she would get into the history when we go into Jackson Ward and she would state about... about how Jackson Ward came about, how the Jews started the neighborhood, and Jackson Ward at that time was second to New Orleans far as the ironworks. You know the porches with all the ironwork and everything. But I guess since Katrina or something... Richmond oughta be number one because a lot of that stuff got destroyed. But, um... we would go through Jackson Ward and she would--she would really... really, which I found really interesting. Uh, we would get all down on Twenty-fifth and Main. And she would talk about, um... uh, during the, uh, Civil War, uh, down there by the marketplace in those warehouses and things down there? They were hospitals and--and they were named after states. You know, whatever state you was from, Alabama, Mississippi, that's the way they had those. Uh, we'd get up on--on, um... you know, uh... St. Johns... history about that, go over to the, um... the Liberty Park and get up there and make that little tour around the statue and she would talk about the, uh, the view from up there, like a--the um, view over the Thames in England. Go over to Chimborazo Park and that was a huge hospital during the Civil War, uh, you know, you go down through Main Street, the iron front building.... Uh, course, Fourteenth and Main. Um... on... they set Richmond on fire, was tobacco warehouses down there. Um... down there where, um... state--well-one--the building right there at--at Twelfth... Twelfth and Main... that's--that's the iron front building. The front of that building is iron front.

And, um... you know, you go all up in Oregon Hill, Hollywood Cemetery, about the... presidents that buried over there, um... And--which I found interesting and a lot of people would... you know, would come into town and they used tot ale those--those things. You go to Maymont Park or Lewis Ginter and... uh, up in the VCU area, right there at, um... Think it's Shafer and... Shafer and... Shafer and... uh...

LB: And Franklin?

HW: ...and Franklin, yeah. You know that's--that's where Ginter--Ginter had a house sat right there. And... it's--it was... I--I--I find Richmond *really* interesting. Um... you know, course, Lumpkin Jail, all that stuff down along Seventeenth Street, which at the time, like, growing up in Fulton? Had no idea... about.... And we should be down there, Seventeenth Street, all down on them cobblestones up in them little alleyways. Had no idea about the history because when I was going to school, we had history book, Virginia history. You had... few... few little... paragraphs in there... and that's all. Far as, you know--well it's a Confederate state! [Laughs.] So, uh... I--I--I find that really interesting, as far as Richmond. Um, you know... in--and right to this day when someone comes into town and they ask a question--ask *me* a question. I ask them what they're interested in because if they tell me that they're interested in a lot of Confederate things, you know, I'll tell them where--where I know they can go. You know, like... the White House of the Confederate, which is down there by MCV back there, you know. I tell them, you know... and a lot of people are. Um...well, the--matter of fact, the young lady was just asking me about what--what side of the river that the slaves had to walk the trail and... because of that--that trolley and that particular tour guide, which you had other tour guides, but I really liked...

working with this lady, cuz she used to really get into details and I'm like, 'What...? I didn't know that! I didn't know that!' You know. I was--I was... sorry that they stopped that. I didn't like driving the trolley cuz they were hot! They didn't have air condition! But... I liked, you know, being--being out there with her when I did catch it. Uh, and, uh... you know, Richmond--it's--it's... Richmond has a lot to offer, you know, and I really think that since they've opened up the river? Like they have? You know that--that--that's major now, too, because all down there on Dock Street. Like I said, I lived right down there. I remember when the Cubans... used to come here. Right down there where the--Annabelle Lee used to come in. They used to bring sugar. That was before the Bay of Pigs, President Kennedy. And we used to walk from our house down there and watch them offload them big palettes of sugar, hoping... that a bag burst open.

LB: [Laughs.]

HW: And it did sometimes! And we'd get sugar. Come on back up the hill, and the Cubans used to walk--walk up the street. We used to have a little--little convenience store, the store name is Margaret. They'd walk up to her store and get their things and they'd walk up the street. We used to think that was so... so amazing. You know. And--and... matter of fact, the... first admiral, black admiral, his name was Admiral Grey, well he was from Fulton. And when we were growing up, when he came home, and you know, he decked out in his whites and everything... thought that was a big thing, you know.... Yeah. But I--I... you know... I wouldn't live nowhere else. I mean, I've been other places, but... this is home. This is home for me.

LB: Well, thank you so, so much.

HW: Yeah. [Laughs.]

LB: You are--you are just the best person to interview, Mr. West, because you remember so much.

HW: It's a lotta old stuff I've--I probably could do, but... I tell you--bout this company, Bruce got it. Bruce got it. He does. I mean--I mean... Mean, we were in a--we were in a human relation class, and Bruce had a *huge* display of stuff. I mean, you know. He had buses, I mean, the different types and he just--he--he had it. Now I don't know what [did] now, but he--he got it.

LB: I'd be surprised if he got rid of any of that stuff. Wouldn't you?

HW: Yeah. He--he definite--he had it. Cuz he, um... he used to--and--and... I don't know if you all gonna interview, um... um... his name is--is Nixon, Nick. He--he pulls the fare boxes. He have a speech problem, he may not--he may not do it, but... he is another one that used to--to, um... you know, really go into the history and stuff, of--of the company.

LB: I'll tell you what. If you can think of anyone who I should talk to--

HW: Yeah.

LB: ...who would be interested in talking to me, please let me know. Can I give you my card.

HW: Yeah.

LB: Actually, Benjamin, can you grab my purse for a second, please? ...Thank you. Grab it, over--thank you. Um... because... I am just really anxious to get a good cross-section of people.

HW: Yeah. See like--and like the guy that you talking about, Richard Barry (?), see Richard came in--in the sixties. See, he was--he was here... um... yeah, Richard and Shelton... Um, Billy Williams. It's about... part-time drivers that retired... that started in the sixties, it--it may be five... four or five that's... that's still here.

LB: See, I wanna get just a really good cross-section.

HW: Yeah.

LB: Men and women.

HW: Well it w--it's only a few women that came. See the women really didn't start coming till...

LB: Well I'm ok if they started later. I'm in--I'm interviewing....

HW: ...like, seven--seven--seventy... seventy (?).

LB: Debora Hopkins?

HW: Yeah.

LB: On Tuesday.

HW: Deborah. Yeah.

LB: And I'm hoping that Celestine Christian is gonna come through with an interview.

HW: Well... Deborah gonna be enough for you.

[Both laugh.]

HW: Yeah. You're gonna... yeah, Deborah gonna be enough for you.

[Laughing.]

HW: Really.

Benjamin: It's been a real pleasure... stories.

HW: Yeah, you, too. Yeah, it's--it's... it's been interesting.

LB: Thank you so much.

HW: Yeah.

LB: I've just enjoyed talking with you so much.

HW: Ok. Alright.

Benjamin: Well this--this is--you get one of these, from the GRTC

LB: [Laughs] ...the GRTC, yeah--goodie bag.

HW: Ok. Something I--